

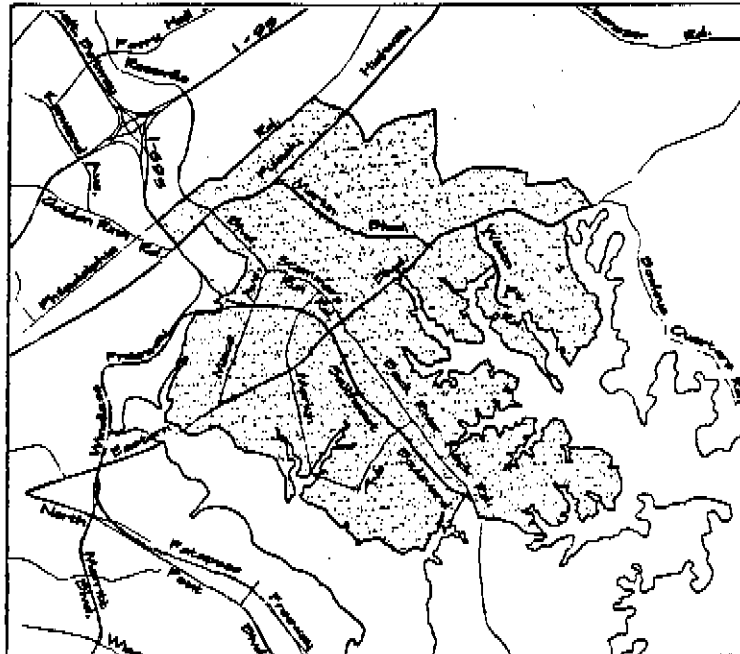
ESSEX - MIDDLE RIVER COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

On June 6, 1994 the Baltimore County Council passed Resolution No. 51-94 sponsored by Councilman Vincent Gardina urging the Baltimore County Planning Board to prepare an Essex-Middle River area plan. The plan was looked upon as a way to promote stabilization of the community. The resolution also called for the plan to become an amendment to the Baltimore County Master Plan.

The Office of Planning and Zoning under the direction of Pat Keller and 5th District Community Planner, Jack Dillon began an assessment of the Essex-Middle River community. The assessment indicated that Baltimore County was providing a great deal of its resources to the Essex-Middle River community, however, there was little coordination between agencies, other non-profit service providers, community and business members. The assessment also highlighted many community development issues that needed to be addressed swiftly to prevent further decline in the area.

In January, 1995 the Essex-Middle River area was identified by the county administration as a priority for coordinated, multi-disciplinary community conservative action. Baltimore County Executive C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger requested that a conservation plan be developed with input from a broad range of citizens in the area with county staff acting as technical support. A meeting was held in the Essex Branch of the Baltimore County Library with over 100 people in attendance to discuss the results of the Essex-Middle River Assessment. A committee was formed involving nearly 75 citizens, and Jack Barnhart, a resident of Middle River and an Essex business leader, agreed to chair the Essex-Middle River Community Action Plan Committee. The committee was comprised of the following 10 sub-committees: infrastructure, housing, transportation, human resources, education, public safety, recreation, leadership development, land use and zoning, and economic development. Each committee submitted a report on June 30, 1995.



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The individual committee reports frequently overlapped in their recommendations, and it became difficult to separate elements of the plan by the original committee structure. Therefore, the following set of recommendations are structured under four general headings: Community Development, Social Enrichment, Economic and Employment Opportunities, and Land Use.

In addition to these four headings are four overall objectives that must be attained for this plan to be an effective tool for the stabilization and revitalization of the Essex-Middle River area. These objectives are as follows:

1. THE COMMUNITY ACTION COMMITTEE SHOULD BECOME AN ON-GOING LINK BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY OF ESSEX- MIDDLE RIVER AND COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

The community action plan process has brought together many individuals and organizations interested in achieving a better Essex-Middle River community. This interest should not be allowed to dissipate. The future of the community ultimately rests with the people of the area, and the continuation of the committee allows the many elements of the community to share ideas and formulate plans. Many of the actions called for in this Report require implementation at different levels, and the on-going Committee should review the implementation and help co-ordinate local actions.

2. THERE NEEDS TO BE BETTER CO-ORDINATION OF SERVICES FROM THE COUNTY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY AND BETTER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE SERVICES AVAILABLE.

Unfortunately, so many of the services are not used to their full potential, and many of the residents are unaware of the opportunities offered. The Government Center itself may be inconvenient for some of the residents dependent upon public transportation, and the county should consider utilizing the schools to a greater degree for community service and resource centers.

3. FUTURE PLANS AND STUDIES SOUGHT TO BE DEVELOPED BY BALTIMORE COUNTY SHOULD COME BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.

Perhaps the single most beneficial aspect of the community conservation report process is the empowerment of the local community to plan for itself. Too often in the past the planning has come from the outside with selective input. This report and call for action reflects a change in that process, which should not be wasted.

4. COMMUNITY PROJECTS AND ACTIONS SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED AND GIVEN BUDGET ITEM STATUS IN CAPITAL BUDGETS AND MASTER PLANS.

There is precedent for communities having their own conservation status in the capital budget, and the Essex - Middle River Community should be accorded that status with on-going prioritization and review of the projects necessary to advance the community.

BACKGROUND

No community is devoid of problems or lacking in opportunity. Baltimore County, however, has been fortunate in the past in having an expanding tax base to cover the increased costs associated with an increasing population and an increasing demand for services. That good fortune, however, has come to an end. On a county-wide basis the growth rate has slowed to the lowest rate among the six (6) major jurisdictions in the Baltimore region with the exception of Baltimore City. The county has the oldest median population and an aging population. As a percentage of overall population the group over 65 years in age has doubled in size over the last twenty (20) years. Income of residents in the county has increased at less than half of the state average over the last ten (10) years. Median housing values are the lowest but for Baltimore City in the metropolitan jurisdictions. The entire County, therefore, is faced with a declining income base, a static property tax base, a decreasing labor force, an aging population, and a greater demand for service. It has become apparent that

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unless a reinvestment is made back into the communities the problems the county is experiencing

will increase as flight from the county becomes a reality.



The Essex - Middle River community has been designated by the Baltimore County administration as a priority area for coordinated, multi-disciplinary community conservation action. Although the majority of the community is a stable community, the older areas of the community have experienced signs of deterioration. Essex - Middle River as a community has been among the hardest hit areas of all of the communities in the metropolitan area from the shift from blue-collar smokestack industry to the technological/ communications era. If jobs and employment are the mortar that holds a community together, then the erosion of the jobs clearly indicates that the stability of the community is weakening. That

has surely happened in this community. Major employers have downsized dramatically, and much of the job base has left the area. A tremendous stock of housing was built, however, to accommodate the labor boom, and that housing has become part of the problem as the jobs have left the area. The transience of a large portion of the community has greatly affected the community's stability.

The Essex - Middle River area is comprised of a little less than 10,000 acres. It is home to over 63,000 people. The average value of housing is 10% less than the county average. The average density of the developed acreage is 13.7 people per acre

compared to an overall county density of 4.16 persons per acre in the urbanized areas. Five (5) of the top ten (10) county elementary schools in serving free and reduced lunches are in the study area. Three (3) elementary schools have a turnover rate of over 60%. Only four (4) of the twelve (12) elementary schools ranked higher than the national average in math and reading. There are concerns over youth gangs appearing in some of the housing complexes and of increased vice and narcotic offenses. Much of the police activity has centered around the rental housing.

One of the primary concerns of area residents and businesses has been the poor image of the community. The image of a community tends over time to reinforce itself, and the image of this community as a stable, hard-working, proud community has deteriorated. The community action plan is an attempt by members of the community and by the County administration to reverse the trend and to support, enhance and conserve the many assets available in the community.